

# Coconino County Comprehensive Plan Executive Summary

## A Conservation-Based Comprehensive Planning Partnership

*Adopted September 23, 2003*

Will a community have a future without planning? Of course—the future will come regardless of whether we have a plan. However, planning allows us to make conscious, deliberate choices about our future.

The *Coconino County Comprehensive Plan* provides a blueprint for making such decisions. It serves as a long-range guide for the future, with goals that provide general direction, and policies that specify the location, form, purpose, and acceptable impacts of development. The *Plan* sets a course for balance between growth, development, and conservation.

## Use of the Plan

The *Comprehensive Plan* will be used as a decision-making tool by residents, landowners, developers, conservationists, the County Community Development Department, Planning & Zoning Commission, and Board of Supervisors.

The *Plan* does not change existing zoning or solve all of the county's problems; instead, it serves as a handbook for implementing the county vision. It specifies policy guidelines that respect the individual and reinforce community values, support healthy functioning ecosystems, and advocate environmental quality.

Mechanisms for implementing the *Plan* include Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances, zoning maps, Area Plans, and specific “action items” such as research and project development.



## The Land Ethic

Imagine, for a moment, our remaining unbuilt landscapes and rural community character disappearing. We value our unique landscapes too much to allow them to be cleared and converted to generally uninspiring development. In pursuing the long-term goals expressed in our vision for Coconino County's future, we have an ethical obligation to the land. This obligation, or "land ethic," applies to everyone—not just to the government or to nonprofit organizations, but to private landowners as well. In *A Sand County Almanac* Aldo Leopold tells us:

Whatever may be the equation for men and land, it is improbable that we as yet know all its terms. The answer, if there is any, seems to be in a land ethic, or some other force which assigns more obligation to the private landowner. A land ethic, then, reflects the existence of an ecological conscience, and this in turn reflects a conviction of individual responsibility for the health of the land.

These concepts are integral to the *Coconino County Comprehensive Plan*, which builds on our strength as community and establishes a solid set of conservation guidelines that allows us to achieve our vision. Assuming responsibility for the future of our lands is the first step in encouraging the kinds of quality development that will ensure the county's long-term value as a place of unsurpassed natural beauty and cultural resources.



## Our Vision for the Future

The County vision is of livable communities and healthy landscapes where:

- ☐ Existing communities accommodate growth while retaining their historic and cultural character
- ☐ Integrated conservation design is the standard for new subdivisions and developments
- ☐ Planned communities and infill development allow the county to both grow and preserve its landscapes
- ☐ Collaborative planning ensures success in addressing issues across jurisdictional lines
- ☐ Natural resources are conserved and land is used efficiently
- ☐ Land uses are compatible with the unique natural environment
- ☐ Environmentally sensitive lands, ecosystems, and habitats are preserved
- ☐ Growth is balanced with available water resources
- ☐ Residents are assured a variety of transportation choices and modes
- ☐ A stable, vibrant economy allows all residents to lead productive lifestyles
- ☐ Residents are provided a range of housing and recreational opportunities
- ☐ Communities are safe and attractive, and residents share a sense of pride and place



## The Conservation Framework

### Conservation: The Plan's Basis

Overwhelmingly, people like living in Coconino County because of its beautiful natural environment. Many appreciate the rural lifestyle and cite it as a primary reason for settling and staying here. Comprehensive planning ensures a proactive, coordinated approach to the development of quality communities that exist in harmony with our environment. The *Plan* seeks to ensure that decisions meet human needs while maintaining the county's ecological integrity. Since we are part of nature and our actions affect the health and vitality of ecosystems, we are responsible for the stewardship of our natural resources.



The *Comprehensive Plan* promotes conservation-based planning. Its “Conservation Framework” presents science-based conservation principles and guidelines for ensuring the long-term health of the environment. These principles and guidelines form the basis for developing the policies specified in the *Plan*.

## Benefits of Conservation-Based Planning

Comprehensive, conservation-based planning benefits not only our natural environment but also developers, residents, and communities. Why? Because it provides lasting value to current and future residents, ensuring the long-term preservation of our environment while accommodating changes to our dynamic communities. Conservation-based planning increases choices for landowners and developers—choices that create better, more livable communities with significant environmental, ecological, social, recreational, and economic benefits. It allows us to balance the interests of residents, developers, and conservationists in a cooperative, fair manner.

The *Comprehensive Plan* attempts to provide more predictability in the development process. Developers can benefit by looking at how to preserve important natural resources such as water quality, riparian or wetland buffers, and wildlife habitat. Furthermore, conservation-based planning approaches often reduce infrastructure construction costs and mitigation measures. Ultimately, the greatest benefactor is the public, who will save money as costs for infrastructure maintenance decrease and open space is protected.

## Guidelines for Decision Making

The following guidelines, which are adapted from research by the Ecological Society of America, link conservation and land use planning. They form the basis of the goals and policies of the *Comprehensive Plan*.

- A. Assess impacts of local decisions in a landscape context.
- B. Make land use decisions that are compatible with the natural potential of the site and the landscape.
- C. Avoid or mitigate for the effects of human use and development on ecological processes and the landscape.
- D. Identify and preserve rare or critical ecosystems, habitats, and associated species.
- E. Minimize the fragmentation of large contiguous areas of habitat and maintain or restore connectivity among habitats.
- F. Minimize the introduction and spread of non-native species and use native plant species in restoration and landscaping.
- G. Conserve use of non-renewable and critical resources.
- H. Avoid land uses that deplete natural resources.
- I. Avoid polluting our communities and environment.
- J. Consider land use decisions over time horizons that encapsulate the natural variability of ecosystems.
- K. Evaluate the effects of land use decisions cumulatively and over time.

### THE CONSERVATION FRAMEWORK

Benefits of Conservation-Based Planning  
Ecological Principles  
Guidelines for Decision Making  
Limitations of Science  
Integrated Conservation Design



BLM



Grant Cooper



John Aber



John Aber





## Element Overviews

### Natural Environment

#### NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Environmentally Sensitive Lands  
Wildlife  
Vegetation  
Forest Ecosystem Health  
Soils  
Air Quality  
Renewable Energy  
Sustainable Building

#### WATER RESOURCES

Water Sources  
Water Providers  
Water Conservation &  
Alternative Sources  
Water Quality  
Regulatory Framework

The people of Coconino County support the protection and stewardship of all our natural resources, as well as the maintenance and restoration of healthy ecosystems. More than any other visible attribute, the condition of these resources reflects how we interact with our environment. The *Comprehensive Plan* addresses concerns about our natural environment by establishing policies that identify, protect, and manage environmentally sensitive areas so that we can continue to enjoy our unique natural heritage. These policies are directed at conserving and managing plant and wildlife communities to ensure that viable populations of all native species survive, maintaining habitat connectivity to prevent landscape fragmentation so that animals can access essential resources and plant communities can flourish, and preventing the spread of nonnative and noxious plant species to promote the health of native species. Policies also address improving the health of our forest ecosystems and protecting life and property from catastrophic wildfires, protecting valuable soil resources and minimizing erosion, minimizing future air pollution so that Coconino County residents continue to enjoy good air quality, and incorporating green building practices and promoting energy efficiency.



Grant Cooper



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### Water Resources

The residents of Coconino County and the natural environment need clean water to survive. As growth continues, we envision using creative approaches along with traditional management policies to ensure the long-term sustainability of our water resources. The *Comprehensive Plan* addresses concerns about water by establishing policies that encourage an efficient management and regulatory infrastructure—one that works with all organizations involved in water management. These policies also address groundwater management at a local level and encourage residents to conserve existing water resources, develop alternative sources of collecting and distributing water, and reuse water whenever possible. Finally, they require water-quality monitoring to ensure that sources remain clean.

### Public Safety

We envision our communities as safe places to live, work, and play. County residents also want public services and facilities that allow us to maintain our quality of life while preserving our cultural and natural resources. In addition, we not only want to reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfire in the wildland/urban interface, but we also want to maintain high levels of fire protection and public safety in all areas. The *Comprehensive Plan* addresses safety concerns with policies that help us avoid or mitigate the dangers posed by natural hazards and prepare us for disasters with top-notch emergency service and quick, appropriate response. These policies also focus on ensuring that our neighborhoods remain safe and crime-free.

#### PUBLIC SAFETY

Wildland/Urban Interface  
Floods, Earthquakes, & Slopes  
Fire Protection  
Disaster Response &  
Management  
Local Emergency Response  
Law Enforcement

#### COMMUNITY SERVICES

Utility Services & Corridors  
Telecommunications  
Infrastructure  
Solid Waste  
Wastewater  
Health & Human Services  
Education

### Community Services

Our county vision includes having adequate public facilities to support desirable land use and development patterns while conserving natural resources. It also involves having high-quality health and human services as well as effective, accessible educational opportunities. The *Comprehensive Plan* addresses community services by establishing policies that provide guidance for siting utility infrastructure in a way that respects our community character, scenic resources, and ecological integrity. It also contains policies that



encourage environmentally compatible solid-waste management and wastewater treatment methods and endorse the best available telecommunications services and infrastructure while ensuring that this infrastructure does not detract from scenic landscapes. Finally, the policies in the “Community Services” Element allow us to coordinate the design, siting, and construction of capital improvement projects in a manner that is timely, orderly, cost-effective, and environmentally sensitive.

Circulation

Another important part of our county vision involves having sufficient transportation infrastructure in rural areas to facilitate safe access for all modes of travel. Our goal is to provide a comprehensive circulation network in a way that minimizes impacts to the natural environment. The *Comprehensive Plan* establishes policies that increase the efficiency and safety of our circulation system while meeting the access and mobility needs of county residents, including needs for non-motorized and alternate modes of transportation. These policies also focus on improving transit service in unincorporated areas, providing infrastructure for alternatives to motorized vehicle travel, and supporting the development of multimodal transportation corridors. Finally, they support air travel while protecting human and natural communities from adverse impacts of aircraft and associated facilities.

Parks & Recreation

Our goal is to offer a variety of parks and recreational opportunities throughout the county for residents and visitors alike. Therefore, we must not only preserve open space but also protect important natural areas and provide stewardship for them. We envision a highly integrated system of passive and active recreational opportunities nested within a community-based network of parks, open spaces, and critical natural areas. The *Comprehensive Plan* addresses concerns about parks and recreation by establishing policies that honor our past by protecting historic resources and archaeological sites. These policies also focus on providing recreational access via a trail system that links communities, public lands, and activity centers while maintaining the integrity of ecosystems. They allow off-highway vehicle use on designated routes but discourage such use where impacts to natural and cultural resources could be significant.

Community Character

The *Comprehensive Plan* seeks to define, preserve, and enhance the quality of the places where we live, work, and enjoy our leisure time. Its goals include protecting the unique characteristics of our communities and providing facilities and services that support community-based activities. To achieve these goals, the *Plan* establishes policies that promote areas of concentrated activity in rural communities and improve the aesthetic character of the county’s commercial, industrial, residential, and gateway areas. It also contains policies that preserve the county’s historic, cultural, and architectural heritage; protect entire ecological landscapes; and enhance scenic vistas, viewsheds, and byways. Other policies encourage the coordination of land use planning, the sharing of resources, and the protection of sacred sites between area tribes and the county. Finally, because we want to continue enjoying natural quiet and dark skies, the “Community Character” Element contains policies for minimizing noise and light pollution.

CIRCULATION

- Roadways
- Public & Private Transit Systems
- Airports & Airspace
- Nonmotorized Circulation
- Infrastructure Design & Development
- Maintenance & Improvements
- Access Management & Safety

PARKS & RECREATION

- Natural Areas
- Trails
- Federal & State Lands
- County Parks & Recreation Areas
- Neighborhood Parks



COMMUNITY CHARACTER

- Community Design
- Rural Activity Centers
- Tribal Lands & Interests
- Historic & Cultural Resources
- Heritage Areas & Landscape Preservation
- Scenic Vistas & Viewsheds
- Scenic Corridors
- Dark Skies
- Natural Quiet

**LAND USE**

Landscapes & Open Space  
Ranches & Ranchlands  
Residential  
Commercial  
Industrial  
Nonconforming Uses  
Locally Undesirable Land Uses

**GROWTH**

Growth Areas  
Cost of Development  
Capital Improvements  
Economic Development

## Land Use

Responsible development is consistent with our resource base, enhances our communities, and protects the integrity of our environment. In our vision for Coconino County, we successfully accommodate growth and consciously decide how development should occur. We ensure the county's long-term viability by integrating "conservation design" methods, promoting infill development on vacant parcels, and providing incentives for quality subdivisions. Rather than relying on traditional "single-parcel" approaches, we incorporate well-designed, environmentally responsible, commercial and industrial development within communities and activity centers. This mixed-use approach not only helps create a range of employment opportunities and a stable economy, but it also helps us preserve open space and prevent fragmented landscapes.

## Growth

The policies in the *Comprehensive Plan* ensure that new development follows available and planned infrastructure, utilities, and services, and that it is balanced with the available water supply. They also promote sustainable building techniques, along with a range of housing types and choices, and retain public land as open space while making key parcels available for development. Finally, they help ensure that we have an equitable means of paying for the costs associated with growth.

## The Planning Partnership

The *Comprehensive Plan* was developed as a community partnership project. The County Community Development Department coordinated with federal and state land/resource agencies, private landowners, and community groups to establish the *Plan's* goals and policies. In addition to the governmental agencies and other organizations that participated in the planning process, it cannot be stressed enough the importance of the participation of property owners, residents, and the general public. With so many important resources to consider, public participation was paramount in developing the *Plan*, and will continue to be in plan implementation.

The *Coconino County Comprehensive Plan* was adopted with unanimous support of the Board of Supervisors September 23, 2003.

## Praise for the Comprehensive Plan

2003 Planning Award for Excellence –*American Planning Association's Small Town and Rural Planning Division*

2003 Technical Publication Award for Excellence –*Society for Technical Communication, Southwest Regional Publications, Art, and Online Competitions*

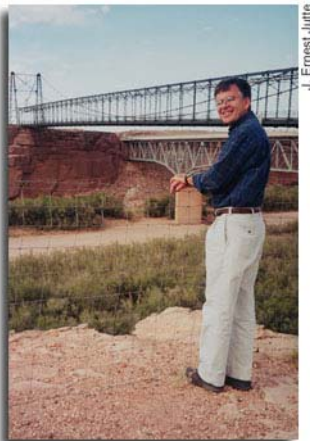
"The plan is positive, proactive, and necessary. I applaud and commend those who prepared it. Excellent work!" –*Coconino County Resident*

"I especially appreciate the focus on preservation of our unique environment and the inclusiveness of all the valued aspects of our county." –*Coconino County Resident*

"This plan meets and exceeds the requirements of Growing Smarter in almost all areas. ... It contains innovative conservation planning techniques that will likely be used as a model for similar communities in years to come. It is clearly laid out, well written, and establishes a compelling purpose and vision that are followed by defined implementation policies. ... [The plan] clearly gives the citizen reader the idea that he or she has a responsibility to be an active steward of the community's future." –*Debra Z. Sydenham, AICP, Arizona Department of Commerce*

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

Contact the Coconino County Community Development Department in Flagstaff. The telephone is 928-226-2700 or visit online at [co.coconino.az.us](http://co.coconino.az.us).



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